F. W. Laurence 1879 from
The VICTORY ascribed to GOD. a
Brooks

A

SERMON,

DELIVERED DECEMBER 2d, 1798.

ON THE LATE

SIGNAL SUCCESSES,

GRANTED TO

HIS MAJESTY'S ARMS.

By MATHER BYLES, D. D.
RECTOR OF ST. JOHN, AND CHAPLAIN
TO THE GARRISON OF NEW-
BRUNSWICK.

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TO THE

CONGREGATION

OF

TRINITY CHURCH,

The following DISCOURSE,

Published at their Request,

Is most respectfully dedicated,

By

The AUTHOR.

A SERMON.

Battle of the Nile August 1 1798
2nd Nelson

PSALM XCVIII. 1.

O ſing unto the Lord a new Song, for He hath done marvellous things, His right Hand and His holy Arm hath gotten him the Victory.

WE are not told who was the author of the Pſalm before us: but as *David* wrote ſo large a proportion of this ſacred book, as he was engaged in ſo many wars, and obtained ſuch frequent and ſplendid victories, it appears moſt probable that it was penned by him. It bears the peculiar ſtamp of the Royal Prophet,—the ſweet Pſalmiſt of Iſrael: and it ſeems to be an effuſion from the heart of that devout Monarch, in conſequence of ſome ſignal ſucceſſes which had attended his arms. We cannot

conceive

conceive a ſentiment upon ſuch a joyful occaſion, more proper in itſelf, or more characteriſtic of that excellent man. Let *David* then be our example; and while we exult in the illuſtrious Triumphs of His MAJESTY'S Arms, let us acknowledge, with the humbleſt gratitude, that it is GOD who has given us the VICTORY! I meet you, my Brethren, this day with particular pleaſure, as I ſee ſuch evident demonſtrations of your Loyalty to the KING; a univerſal, undiſſembled tranſport animating every countenance, and ſparkling in every eye. I acknowledge the ſtrict propriety of thoſe praiſes which you beſtow upon the intrepid conduct of our Officers, and the unrivalled gallantry of the *Britiſh* Sailors. It is but equitable to give honor to whom honor is due: and perhaps it would be difficult to produce an inſtance in hiſtory, of men who had a more juſt claim to the applauſes of their country. But after all, it becomes us, as Chriſtians, to recollect the idea of the text, to look beyond ſecond cauſes to the *Firſt Cauſe* of every event, to realize the Divine Agency, and bow our knees in Thankſgiving to God. To aſſiſt you in cultivating theſe diſpoſitions of heart is the proper province of the pulpit, and the deſign of the preſent diſcourſe, "O ſing unto the Lord a new Song, for he hath done marvellous things, *His* right Hand and *His* holy Arm hath gotten him the Victory." page 14.

From this paſſage we collect two propoſitions, diſtinct indeed,

indeed, but closely connected:—That God always obtains the victory Himself:—And that He gives it to whom He pleases.

God always obtains the victory *Himself*: never did any successfully oppose *Him*. * "Who ever hardened himself against God, and hath prospered?"

We read of rebel Angels, with Satan at their head, who being lifted up with pride, fell into the condemnation of the Devil. Satan was the first Rebel; the first who disdained subordination, despised Government, insulted his KING, and renounced his GOD: And the same levelling spirit still † "worketh in the children of disobedience." He deceives and infatuates a distracted world; and under the specious names of *Liberty* and *Equality* introduces anarchy and confusion. These turbulent apostate Spirits, it seems, were not contented with their proper rank in the scale of beings; ‡ "they left their own habitations," and were driven down, thunderstruck, into the abyss of irretrievable perdition. There they are reserved "in everlasting chains, under darkness, to the judgment of the great Day." This is the first Victory which Revelation informs us the glorious God obtained over His enemies. *Michael* and his Angels, in the power of God, encountered the Dragon and his Angels: and the Rebel Host fell from Heaven, and their place is no more to be found. To this the

* *Job.* ix, 4. † *Eph.* ii, 2. ‡ *Jude* 6.

the Prophet *Iſaiah* ultimately refers; though in a ſecondary ſenſe, that beautiful and elevated paſſage may be applied to the *Aſſyrian* monarch, and the enemies of ancient *Iſrael*; and in the ſame ſenſe, we may with propriety apply them to thoſe, over whom God now permits us to triumph. * "How art thou fallen from Heaven, O Lucifer, ſon of the Morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didſt weaken the Nations! For thou haſt ſaid in thy heart, I will aſcend into Heaven, I will exalt my Throne above the Stars of God.—I will aſcend above the heights of the Clouds, I will be like the moſt High. Yet thou ſhalt be brought down to Hell, to the ſides of the Pit. They that ſee thee ſhall narrowly look upon thee, and conſider thee, ſaying, Is this the Man that made the Earth to tremble, that did ſhake Kingdoms?"

From age to age, the victories and the triumphs of the ALMIGHTY have been repeated among men. How did *Pharaoh* boaſt and ſwell, and oppoſe the mandates and the terrors of God! *His* profane language was alſo ſomething ſimilar to that of our enemies—† "Who is the Lord, that I ſhould obey his voice?—I know not the Lord, neither will I obey his voice." He raiſed all his numerous army, and was determined to ſtrike the deciſive blow. It was now come to a pitched battle between the tyrant of *Egypt* and the God of *Iſrael*. The Red Sea muſtered its waves for

* *Iſaiah*, xiv. 11, 16. † *Exod.* v. 2.

for the onſet :—down they ruſhed upon the proud purſuers, * " and buried *Egypt* all in arms." ‖ " Then ſang *Moſes* and the children of *Iſrael* this ſong unto the Lord, and ſpake, ſaying, I will ſing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed glorioufly; the horſe and his rider hath he thrown into the ſea."

When our bleſſed Lord was here below, he exemplified the ſame triumphs :—He always obtained the victory. So the tempter found it, when he fled vanquiſhed from the field, and deſcending Angels ſhouted the Conqueror.

The triumphs of his Grace were alike illuſtrious. How ſtubborn the hearts of ſinners! but how ſharp were his arrows in their hearts! and how were they in multitudes led off conquered! A little company of poor Fiſhermen ſally out, unarmed, againſt all the forces of Earth and Hell: and lo! Satan falls down like lightning from Heaven, and the kingdoms of the world ſubmit before them. See the Victor on his march, going forth † " conquering and to conquer." The heart of every converted ſinner is the ſubject of his triumphs. The ALMIGHTY REDEEMER overcomes all oppoſition, and every thing which exalts itſelf againſt his kingdom. And in the end, he will ſo ſubdue all nations, when the mighty Angel ſhall proclaim, with the trumpet of God, ‡ " All the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our LORD, and of his

* *Dr. Watts.* ‖ *Exod.* xv. 1. † *Rev.* vi. 2. ‡ *Rev.* xi. 15.

his CHRIST, and he ſhall reign forever and ever."

I now proceed to the ſecond propoſition before us; that, as God always obtains the victory Himſelf, ſo He gives it to whom He pleaſes.

The Sovereign God diſpoſes the events of battles, and turns the conqueſt to the many or to the few, according to his own counſels. His are the ſecond cauſes, by which the government of the world is, in ſo myſterious a manner, managed. The exertions of a ſingle Arm, through his influence and aſſiſtance, may determine the fate of Nations. A *Sampſon* ſhall be raiſed up, an inſpired champion, to drive armies before him. A ſon of *Dodo* ſhall * "ariſe, and ſmite the *Philiſtines* until his hand be weary, and his hand cleave unto his ſword, and the Lord ſhall work a great victory on that day, and the people return after him only to the ſpoil." Even a Heathen *Naaman* ſhall be the inſtrument in his hand, and by him † "the Lord may give victory to *Syria*."

David himſelf, to whom we are probably indebted for the words of the text, was a remarkable inſtance of God's giving the victory to whom he pleaſes. The blooming little ſtripling was fired by the menaces of the tall monſter of *Gath*, when he defied the armies of the Living God. Out ran the indignant youth, with only a ſling and a few pebbles, to the rugged encounter. ‡ "Thou comeſt to

* ii *Sam.* xxiii, 10. † ii *Kings*, v, 2. ‡ i *Sam.* xvii, 45.

to me, ſaid he, with a ſword, and with a ſpear, and with a ſhield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hoſts, the God of the armies of *Iſrael:* He ſhall deliver you into my hand." And away ſang the victor-ſtone toward the broad front of the enemy:—down fell the inſolent boaſter, and bit the ground, in blood and rage, and dying agony. Well might ſuch a grand event be gratefully recollected, and devoutly acknowledged long after.§ "It is God who giveth ſalvation to Kings, who delivereth *David* his ſervant from the hurtful ſword."

It becomes us, my brethren, to acknowledge, that our own ſword is inſufficient for our defence; that our own right hand cannot ſave us; that it is God "who does marvellous things, whoſe right hand and holy arm getteth him the victory."† "The horſe is prepared againſt the day of battle: but ſafety is of the Lord." Not the united forces of troops by land, and fleets by ſea, can command ſucceſs: but it all depends upon the ſecret, irreſiſtible ſcheme of Providence; the regular plan in the counſels of the Divine mind.

How frequently do we ſee a Sovereign God blaſting the moſt ſanguine expectations of men! Our enemies at the preſent day exhibit a ſtriking example of this. How did their gay armies, a little while ago, march from the interior country, and crowd to their reſpective ports! How cheerfully

§ *Pſal.* 144, 10. † *Prov.* 21, 31.

fully did they embark! and how proudly did their ſquadron iſſue into the ocean, ſecure of conqueſt! And, ſince their departure, how impatiently have their countrymen, friends and connections, waited to hear of their ſucceſs, and wondered at the delay; while their mangled corpſes have been ſilent and inactive; bloated and disfigured at the bottom of the ſea, or covering the waves with blood and carnage! So* the mother of *Siſera* looked out at her window, and cried through the latteſs, "why is his chariot ſo long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariot? Her wiſe ladies anſwered her, yea, ſhe returned anſwer to herſelf, "Have they not ſped? Have they not divided the prey? To *Siſera* a prey of divers colours, a prey of divers colours of needle-work, of divers colours of needle-work, on both ſides, meet for the necks of them that take the ſpoil?" At this very inſtant, when the fond mother, and the flattering court, were preparing their ſongs of triumph, *Siſera* had done with mortal things: his pale head lay faſtened to the earth in the tent of *Jael*, and the quivering corpſe bled at a diſtance. In the fine turn of words, the beautiful *Pleonaſm*, of the *Hebrew* poeteſs, "At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell; where he bowed, there he fell down dead."

The *Cauſes* upon which victory depends, the ſame Infinite God regulates exactly as he pleaſes. The cou-

rage.

* *Judg.* v. 28.

rage of the hero ſhall inſpire a *Joſhua*: but when *Achan* commits a treſpaſs in the accurſed thing, *Joſhua* himſelf ſhall be diſheartened, and his troops ſcattered in confuſion before the enemy. The conduct of the politician ſhall dignify *Ahithophel*, that he ſhall ſhine, and pronounce, like the oracle of God: and yet this counſel ſhall be turned into fooliſhneſs, if God chooſes to diſappoint it. How often, to open the way to victory, does the Heaven-bred horror, the panic from God, catch like a contagion through the boldeſt cohorts, and intimidate the moſt gallant commander. They ſtart at the ſhaking of a leaf, and flee when none purſueth. "*Five of you," ſaid the *Jewiſh* lawgiver to the ancient people, "ſhall chaſe an hundred, and an hundred of you ſhall put ten thouſand to flight: and your enemies ſhall fall before you by the ſword."

The great Governor of the world can make the *minuteſt* cauſes produce the grandeſt effects: or he can work without means, or againſt means, juſt as he pleaſes. When *Jericho* is deſtined to deſtruction, the trumpets of the *Jubilee* ſhall ſound:—down fall the lofty bulwarks thundering to the ground, and the invaders march ſtraight forward to the conqueſt. When the vaſt army of the *Midianites* ſpread over the plain, numerous as the graſshoppers, a little handful of men is directed to go

* *Lev.* xxvi. 8.

go out againſt them: and yet this ſmall number, ſaid the Lord,* is "too many for me to give the *Midianites* into their hands, leſt *Iſrael* vaunt themſelves againſt me, ſaying, "mine own hand hath ſaved me." This little band, therefore, is crumbled away, by one diminution after another, till three hundred men only are retained for the enterpriſe: and the unnumbered hoſtile army withers before them, at the blaze of a few lamps, and the craſh of a few pitchers. But then, recollect, that was not all—there was the ſword of the LORD, and of *Gideon.*

Thus, my brethren, we have endeavoured to illuſtrate the propoſitions before us. The Almighty God always gets the victory himſelf;—The Sovereign God gives it to whom he pleaſes. He orders all the ſecond cauſes of it; blows the trumpet to encountering fleets and armies; ſpirits the hero, or intimidates him, exactly as He chooſes; and decides the event of battles: And to convince us that it is all from Himſelf, the greateſt events are frequently produced by the minuteſt means. "†The race is not to the ſwift, nor the battle to the ſtrong."

I ſhall now conclude with a few reflections.

From what we have heard, how ſafe and happy are the favourites of this God! They are under the beſt protection,

* *Judg.* vii, 2. † *Ecc.* ix, 11.

protection, and are ſecure of final victory. "*Though a troop ſhould overcome them, they ſhall overcome at the laſt." On the other hand, how vain is every attempt to oppoſe this Glorious God, and to injure and oppreſs his faithful people! *Rabſhakeh* made the abſurd and unſucceſsful attempt:—let us attend for a moment to his haughty and licentious language. Hear the words of the *Great Nation*. "†Let not *Hezekiah* deceive you, for he ſhall not be able to deliver you out of my hand. Neither let *Hezekiah* make you truſt in the Lord, ſaying, the Lord will deliver us.—Hath any of the Gods of the Nations delivered at all his land out of my hand?—Where are the Gods of *Hamath*, and of *Arpad?* Where are the Gods of *Sepharvaim*, *Hena* and *Ivah?* have they delivered *Samaria* out of my hand? Who are they, among all the Gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of my hand, that the Lord ſhould deliver *Jeruſalem* out of my hand?"—What inſolence, and what blaſphemy is here! We learn from this paſſage, that *gaſconades* are not modern inventions: they are as old as the days of *Rabſhakeh*. And were our adverſaries better acquainted with the ſacred Scriptures, we ſhould be apt to imagine, that they had the whole of this conceited rhapſody (which you may read at your leiſure) conſtantly before them; that they conſidered it as the grand model of military eloquence; ſtudied it cloſely; and

* *Gen.* xlix, 19. † ii *Kings*, xviii, 29.

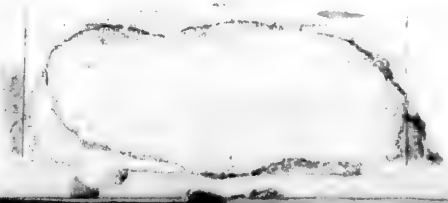
and endeavoured to imitate it, as far as they were able, in their public proclamations and manifeſtoes. But after all, what was the reſult of *Rabſhakeh's* arrogance and profaneneſs?—" *It came to paſs that night, that the Angel of the Lord went out, and ſmote in the camp of the *Aſſyrians*, an hundred four-ſcore and five thouſand." A writer of more fire than judgment would probably have deſcribed this cataſtrophe in a different manner. He would have ſaid, the Angel of the Lord *ruſhed* out upon them like a whirlwind—like a thunderclap—like a flaſh of lightening: but the inſpired hiſtorian only tells us, calmly, that the Angel *went* out. It required no exertion: it was a ſerene, eaſy, evening walk to *him*, to defeat their united forces. Silent as a midnight damp, he moved on, and the whole puiſſant army ſtretched out breathleſs.—Their ſouls were licked up in an inſtant, and the camp was covered with corpſes. In like manner, ſhall all they that riſe up againſt the church of the Living GOD finally periſh, " †Whoſoever ſhall fall upon that ſtone ſhall be broken: but on whomſoever it ſhall fall, it will grind him to powder."

The ſeaſon will not ſuffer me to enlarge any further upon this point: it is time to draw to a concluſion. From what we have heard, we learn, to whom we muſt aſcribe the victories, in which we rejoice this day. In this ſacred place, we have conſtantly offered our moſt ardent petitions to

* ii *Kings*, xix. 35. † *Luke*, xx. 18.

heather cold - No Stoves!

to God, that he would give us the victory over our enemies. And how has God heard us! Let us then acknowledge that the victory is not our's, but the Lord's. With ſurpriſe, and with tranſport, we have ſeen one welcome Packet after another, confirming, and enlarging our ſucceſſes. And, my brethren, when have our irreſiſtible Navies, the floating bulwarks of the Kingdom, been more potent, and more formidable? At what period of hiſtory, have their victories been more illuſtrious, complete and deciſive? Some have ſpread the terror of the *Britiſh* Arms to the burning line, and others to the Northern Ocean: Some have rode with unrivalled Majeſty on theſe *American* ſeas: Others have controlled the Eaſtern world, and anticipated the firſt bluſh of the dawning day: and others have recalled to our memories the miracles of ancient times, by turning the waters of *Egypt* into Blood. In this uninterrupted ſeries of proſperous events, is not the Almighty Hand conſpicuous? ſhall we not acknowledge and adore it? It is God alone who gives the victory, and determines the dubious conteſt, when the fate of an Empire hangs in ſuſpence, and waits for the deciſion of an hour. Every deſcending ſword is guided by him: and every random ſhot executes his commiſſion. It is He who over-rules, when contending ſquadrons diſpute the ſovereignty of the ſeas, and involved in ſmoke and flame, denounce vengeance from the mouth of their cannon. He ſits the ſupreme Arbiter, weighs their different pretenſions in His impartial balance:



balance: He frowns and they are defeated; and victory attends his ſmile.) Let us then, after the example of *David*——But methinks, I am interrupted.—

"What have *we* to do," ſays the gay infidel, "with "*David* or his examples? *David* died, and was buried, "three thouſand years ago. Had he lived in the preſent "*enlightened* age, and been acquainted with our aſtoniſh-"ing diſcoveries, he would doubtleſs have expreſſed him-"ſelf with more propriety. After paying a delicate com-"pliment to his own courage, and conduct, and military "abilities; he would have attributed his ſucceſs to mere "chance, good fortune, and lucky accidents. The "doctrine of Divine Agency is now perfectly obſolete: "and nothing can be more unfaſhionable, than to unite "with ſolemnity in an act of Thankſgiving to God.— "The ideas of mankind are now more enlarged, their "minds more improved, and their manners more highly "poliſhed: and to revive ſuch antiquated opinions and "practices, would only expoſe a man to ſovereign con-"tempt."

Happy am I, therefore, that it is in my power to produce more *modern* examples. We are informed that one* of our Admirals, immediately after a moſt ſevere and deciſive action, which will tranſmit his name with the moſt vivid luſter to the lateſt poſterity, called all his ſurviving company

* *Admiral* DUNCAN.

company upon the deck, and united with them in humble adorations of that God, who had preſerved them when in imminent danger, and given them the victory. It is not eaſy to conceive a nobler ſpectacle, than that gallant commander; in one hour, perfectly calm and ſerene, amidſt all the tumult, and horrors, and thunder of the battle; and in the next, melting in grateful tears before the Majeſty of Heaven:—in one hour, giving full demonſtration, that he feared the face of no mortal man; and in the next, not aſhamed to confeſs, that he was deeply impreſſed with the fear of his Maker. The mind that is not ſtruck with the exquiſite beauty of this ſudden tranſition, muſt not only be void of all religious principle; but alſo, totally deſtitute of all ſentiment, and all taſte.

The other inſtance to which I ſhall point you, is that of the* triumphant hero of the day; whoſe aſtoniſhing exploits are the immediate occaſion of the preſent diſcourſe. After a naval victory, accompliſhed with ſuch reſiſtleſs enterpriſe, and ſuch brilliant ſucceſs, as the annals of hiſtory can ſcarcely parallel; when a feebler mind would have been intoxicated with vanity and ſelf-importance; we ſee, in one of his official letters, this devout ſentence dropping ſpontaneouſly from his pen. "Almighty God has bleſſed his Majeſty's Arms in the battle, by a victory over the fleet of the enemy." How modeſt and unaſſuming is this expreſſion! We applaud the Hero,

* *Admiral* NELSON.

Hero, and we love the Man. He does not attribute the victory to his own conduct, and perſonal bravery, but aſcribes it entirely to the ALMIGHTY. He was himſelf perfectly capable of judging, actually preſent upon the ſpot, expoſed to every danger, and minutely obſerving every circumſtance: and the reſult of the whole was, a full conviction that it was God who crowned him with conqueſt. As an intelligent Officer, he perceived it: and as a humble and grateful Chriſtian, he confeſſed it.—I have now produced two examples, which none of us need to be aſhamed to follow: and let the ſcoffing infidel bluſh, if he is capable of bluſhing, when he ſees two men, of ſuch ſuperior character, acknowledging the Divine Agency, and that they owe all their ſucceſſes to God;—characters highly elevated, far out of the reach of all the pointleſs ſhafts of his impotent ridicule.

To cloſe all. How baſe and ungrateful will it be in any of us to "turn this grace of God into wantonneſs"; and inſtead of the rational and religious rejoicing, which ſhould diſtinguiſh the Man and the Chriſtian, to ſubſtitute the noiſy frolick, the unſeaſonable and mad revel; the momentary *blaze* which is but as the "crackling of thorns under a pot!" Let us make a right improvement of the mercies we have already received, and "continue inſtant in prayer": then may we humbly hope for further victories and ſucceſſes. * "Go," ſaid the proſtrate Prophet, "ſeven

* 1 *Kings*, xviii. 43.

" ſeven times, and look toward the *Sea*: and lo! a cloud as a man's hand appeared, and the Heaven's grew black with clouds"; the anſwering voice of God ſounded at a diſtance; and the bleſſing poured down abundant. So while we wait upon our God, he will ſtill hear us; NEW SONGS ſhall aſcend to him, and " in his Temple we will ſpeak of His Glories."

AMEN.